Remarks for Owen Chamberlain's memorial
By Jeanne Miller

I met Owen a week after arriving in Berkeley in 1973. In high school and college I had watched Berkeley erupting in the battle to protect free speech and to stop the war in Vietnam and I knew I wanted to live here someday. Deane Merrill, a Cal graduate whom I had known at the University of Chicago, where he was a Physics postdoc, had preceded me to Berkeley and was working at LBL. He told me there was a secretarial job open in the Segre-Chamberlain Group and he'd be happy to see if he could arrange an interview. I politely declined. Physics was not a remote interest of mine and working at a government lab sounded to me like a bad science fiction movie. Besides, he had told me that Owen Chamberlain was a Nobel laureate and a distinguished scientist - not the sort of person, I thought, who would want to hire a young woman who had come to Berkeley in hopes of a life of political activism.

Deane persisted, however. (It may have had something to do with the fact that I had borrowed money from him and had no prospect of paying it back until I had a job.) And a few days later I found myself in Bldg. 50 meeting the Segre-Chamberlain Group secretary who was quitting to go to graduate school. That was Suzie Sayre, who subsequently became a lifelong friend. Then I met Owen. He was wearing sneakers and had shoulder length graying hair and a sparkle in his eye. What ensued was less an interview than a conversation - a **long** conversation - and, maybe, less a conversation than a meeting of the minds. I left knowing I wanted to work for this man. I now know that this was a common reaction to meeting Owen.

As luck would have it, Owen chose me for the job and conveyed his decision to the Physics Division. Later he told me that Bob Birge, who was then head of the Division, came to Owen's office with my file in his hand complaining, "I've read through this whole application and nowhere does it say she can type!" Owen's response was, "If she doesn't know how to type, she can learn."

Where else could you find a manager who would hire a secretary who might not be able to type? But that was one of Owen's hallmarks: his belief in the educability of every person. He was a supreme teacher, not just in the classroom but in every context. He had the special ability to meet you at your level of knowledge of a subject and go from there. You never felt ignorant in his presence because his interest was in educating, not in judging how lacking you might be. I remember in the early 70's his explaining to me how a computer works, beginning with 1's and 0's. A decade later, when I was learning TeX, a markup language for typesetting equations, he encouraged me to abandon the bulky manual and just sit with someone's printed manuscript,

comparing the input and the results. He was right - that was a much faster way to learn the basics.

Well, I **did** know how to type, and I started working with the group on September 25, Ray Fuzesy's birthday. In fact my first afternoon was spent at his party in Bldg. 80. And that, too, was indicative of the environment I had just landed in. The Segre-Chamberlain Group was a close-knit family, and Owen managed the group as a fond father might. Yes, there were family tensions at times, but Owen genuinely cared about each member and his directed attention went a long way toward keeping everybody together and doing their best work.

We could always count on his support for just causes. Whenever I heard that the Division or the Lab management had just done - or was about to do - something rash that would affect us negatively, I would alert him. Then he would grin and say, "Let's write a letter." That was my cue to draft a well-reasoned examination of the problem and propose a better solution. Since his name would be on the letter above mine, I was forced to calm my passion and take a logical approach.

One of my jobs was to open and sort Owen's mail. Since he never got through the whole pile, I had to make sure the most urgent and important papers were at the top. It didn't always work, because he unrelentingly ignored administrative obligations in favor of more interesting calls for his attention. He could spend a whole afternoon on a single letter if it contained an intriguing physics problem or a request for help from a group espousing a social cause he supported. One day he composed a 3-page letter to a high school student in Australia who was writing a biographical essay about Owen and wanted to know more about his scientific life than could be gleaned from published sources. Owen wrote a thoughtful response giving some details about problem-solving during the Manhattan Project, about being so high on adrenaline during the antiproton experiment that he hardly had to sleep for 4 to 6 weeks, and about his gratitude for being educated by "two of the world's best physicists," referring to Fermi and Segre.

Another of my jobs was to keep anything that I ever wanted to see again from disappearing into his office, where teetering piles of paper covered every surface. And that was better than in his campus office, where the papers covered the floor, as well, except for narrow tracks for walking. I must say, though, that Owen was good at extracting single pieces of paper from the piles when they were wanted. And that's why I never dared to try to organize his office.

Owen was one of those rare highly successful people who haven't a shred of self-importance about them. He eschewed all the -ism's: racism, sexism, classism (as an example, he always introduced me as his "colleague"), and took great pains to make sure that life was as fair as it could be for those around him and any others he could reach. And his reach, as we all know, was long, stretching into education outreach and international politics. It was an honor to know him and a double honor to work with him. His passing leaves a gap in the world.